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SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY RESULTS FROM B1/B2 VISA VALIDATION
STUDY FOR LITHUANIA

REF: VILNIUS 986

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: We have completed work on the first three months of a year-long, B1/B2 validation study. Two percent of our randomly selected applicants during this period did not return, while another one percent remain as suspected yet unconfirmed overstays. While this preliminary data does not constitute a statistically valid study, we are nonetheless pleasantly surprised by the result and will be keen to see if this data reflects a genuine decrease in Lithuanian overstays. At the same time, we realize that our validation study will not capture some instances of visa misuse, such as those who work illegally during their visits to the United States and those who use their visas to immigrate to America at some time in the future. END SUMMARY.

Three Months of Year-Long Study Complete

12. (U) We have completed the first three months of our validation study on all issued B1/B2 visas for Lithuanian applicants during the year-long period between November 2004 and October 2005 (reftel). This study will provide us with an approximate overstay rate, within a small margin of error, for all Lithuanian business and tourist visitors over an extensive period of time. We are implementing this validation study in a "rolling" fashion -- i.e., we are performing checks continuously, rather than all at one-time -- and are therefore able to review results while the study is ongoing.

13. (U) We issued a total of 3,492 B1/B2 visas to Lithuanian citizens during the year-long period of the study. Although the actual number of issuances during the year-long period was somewhat lower than our earlier estimate, we will in the end have a total sample size of just over 700, comfortably more than the minimum required sample size of 682. We issued 678 B1/B2 visas during the first three months of the study period (November 2004 - January 2005). Using the methodology described reftel, we set our sampling interval at 1/5 and drew a random sample of 137 cases during these first three months.

Low Overstay Rate, So Far

14. (SBU) The following is a breakdown of the results from the first three months of the study:

Confirmed Returned	- 102
Did Not Travel	- 30
Confirmed Did Not Return	- 3
Insufficient Data (Still investigating)	- 2

Total Sample Size	- 137

15. (U) We note that these results reflect only applicants from the November 2004 - January 2005 period and cannot be extrapolated to draw conclusions regarding applicants for the entire year. Only the complete study will provide data for the year-long period, and include a much larger sample to make the results statistically valid with a standard error of less than five percent at a 95 percent confidence interval. These preliminary results, while useful, cannot provide us a statistically valid overstay rate with any level of confidence.

16. (SBU) Two percent of our randomly selected applicants -- three individuals -- were confirmed to have not returned. An additional one percent could not be conclusively determined, and can be considered suspected overstays until we complete our investigation of the cases. A surprisingly large percentage, 22 percent, did not travel even 10 months after receiving visas. We were able to determine most cases by telephone calls to the applicants themselves, although in some cases we also used the mail and contacted employers to double-check results or investigate further.

Some Initial Conclusions

17. (SBU) Although it is difficult to draw substantive conclusions with such a small sample size, the low number of overstays thus far is surprising. We are keen to see if this preliminary data reflects a genuine decrease in overstays from Lithuania.

18. (SBU) Two of the three confirmed overstays were retired women visiting relatives in the United States, a profile matching a persistently large number of our visa applicants. The third confirmed overstay and both of the cases for which we have insufficient data are young cruise line employees, who are by nature more itinerant and whose return is more difficult to confirm.

Concerns Regarding Study Results

19. (U) Work during this initial period has also revealed some concerns regarding the results of our validation study. Any validation study, even one conducted for applicants over an extensive period, generally poses only one primary question: at a reasonable time after receiving a visa, did a particular applicant return to his/her home country? Anecdotal evidence from the interviewing window, however, tells us that many Lithuanians use their B1/B2 visas not to immigrate permanently to the United States, but to work illegally for up to six months out of the year in order to bolster their meager income back home. Yet a validation study records such an offender as a "Confirmed Return," since he/she generally would have returned by the time of the study and because we usually cannot determine whether the person in question engaged in illegal work while in the United States. Our preliminary data does not dispel this concern, as nine percent of our confirmed returns admitted to staying significantly longer, usually five to six months, than they claimed they would when applying for the visa.

110. (U) Anecdotal evidence also indicates that other Lithuanians who use B1/B2 visas to move permanently to the United States do not always do so immediately after receiving their visas. We have seen cases involving Lithuanians who wait up to several years with a valid B1/B2 visa (usually valid for 10 years) before moving to America to reside illegally or seek a change of status. We therefore are left only to wonder how many of the 22 percent of applicants who did not travel, and how many of those who returned after their first trip, will use their visas to move permanently to the United States at some more convenient time in the future. Two of the three applicants who did not return, and both of the suspected but unconfirmed overstays, had previously traveled to the United States. Given the complex nature of Lithuanian emigration patterns, therefore, we recognize that our validation study may not catch a significant portion of visa misuse by Lithuanian citizens.

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